

The Maids of Contessa Carina

The Urth list — 5 messages, 3 voices, 27 Jun 2008

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Dave Tallman — 27 Jun 2008, 06:04

In Eschatology and Genesis, the Contessa Carina has three maids. She calls on Solange and Kyneburga. Her maid Lybe is present with her. I found their saint's legends on the net.

St. Solange: She was abducted by force, but she struggled so violently that she fell from his horse while he was crossing a stream. Her abductor grew enraged and beheaded her with his sword; Solange's severed head invoked three times the Holy Name of Jesus. Solange picked up her head in her own hands and walked with it as far as the church of Saint-Martin in the village of Saint-Martin-du-Crot.

St Cyneburga: It is said that a prestigious Royal marriage was arranged for the young Cyneburga, presumably involving her abandoning her nunnery in Gloucester. To avoid leaving the service of God, she fled into hiding in the city where she was taken in as the servant of a baker. The baker soon wished to adopt her, but his wife was consumed with jealousy and, when the baker was out one day, she murdered Cyneburga, chopped off her head and threw it into a well near the south gate of the city. When the husband returned home and called out to his maidservant, she replied from the well!

St Lybe: Virgin martyr of Eutropia, with Eutropia and Leonis. They died at Palmyra, Syria. Lybe was beheaded.

St. Carina: One of her companions was beheaded, but she was not. She died under torture.

Three maids of the Contessa, all named for beheaded saints. This starts to look like a clue. Too much time is spent on the description and emotional reactions of the woman on the Bridge of Air for her not to be highly significant in Sev's life; i.e. she's his mother, Catherine. (There's also the Catherine/Carina name near-match). The maids with names of beheaded saints hint at a series of her khabits that participated in the elevation ceremony as "Katharine." I think we can allow Wolfe enough leeway for trickery to say that Catherine's face was "strange" and "unknown" if Sev only saw her khabits. The Thecla khabit in the House Azure was not a perfect double.

After Catherine time-traveled back, got pregnant, and bore Severian, she herself might have been kept young using khabit blood in the third level of the dungeon until she was finally executed by Allowin's Necklace to provide the grave-robbery corpse. Years in the dungeon and the effects of strangulation might render her unrecognizable as the same woman Sev saw on the day of the flood.

b sharp — 27 Jun 2008, 21:08 · follows Dave Tallman

Dave Tallman I agree with Marc Aramini. I think you are really ON to something here! I don't think anyone else in the 11 or 12 year history of this list has noted the beheading hint regarding the maids. (Maybe Roy would know)

Actually I'm a little pissed because just a few days ago (I swear!) I was searching out the lives of Saints Solange, Kyneburga and Lybe. In my search I was intrigued by the fact that two had been beheaded but discouraged that the third one seemed to have died some other way, and gave up pursuing that. I'm glad your obsession with Catherine's beheading at the Elevation drove you to check and got you to the right sites showing all three were beheaded.

I think the meaning is still far from clear. And since the first four books were meant to be complete, how in blue blazes did Wolfe expect anyone to connect Contessa Carina and her maids to the Elevation ceremony maid without the loggia scene hint in Urth? Perhaps it would have been possible for some super-genius not ever residing here...but.. Well..anyway.

Assuming there are kaibit maids involved here, who is the original cell donor? Is she an exultant in the House Absolute or elsewhere or an armigette living in the Citadel? Is the original ever seen or mentioned? Was Severian the son of the original or a kaibit?

Dave you seem to be mushing all these characters together as Catherine/Carina. Are you thinking that there is or isn't a real Carina? And I think you are suggesting that Severian's mother was in the loggia and in the coffin, while her kaibit(s) served as St. Katharine?

Well, I have to check a few things in the text when I get home. Hope more comes from this!

-bsharp

Dave Tallman — 28 Jun 2008, 07:17 · in reply to b sharp

b sharp wrote:

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I take the original cell donor to be an exultant from the House Absolute. From the play: "The Contessa waits outside, and as she is of exalted blood, and a favorite of our sovereign's, I beg you see her first," and "Eight years since my girlhood have I abode in this House Absolute." I believe she escaped to the past to become Catherine, the mother of Severian. I also believe that the maid khabits were made for her after her imprisonment, since she was alone when she met Ouen.

In another post I mentioned the lines about the Contessa prolonging her life by bearing a child. She escaped the flood by going to the past. This is a time-loop paradox for the first Severian, if he caused the situation leading to his own conception. I'll assume the first Catherine escaped to the past for some other reason, such as an Ascian invasion. Once a Sev with a good chance to bring the New Sun was conceived and attracted the interest of the Heiogrammates, the loop could be maintained by coercion if necessary, hence the guards Sev saw with the woman.

Dave you seem to be mushing all these characters together as Catherine/Carina. Are you thinking that there is or isn't a real Carina? And I think you are suggesting that Severian's mother was in the loggia and in the coffin, while her kaibit(s) served as St. Katharine?

The name "Carina" was probably fictional, invented by Dr. Talos. Sev must have brought information about that final day of the Commonwealth back to the past so that it could be added to Canog's book, but he didn't know the woman's real name. The name Catherine is the one she gave Ouen; it may not be genuine. The name sounded old-fashioned to Ouen, which is a mistake a time-traveler to the past might make.

You are correct; I am suggesting that Sev's mother was in the loggia and the coffin, while her khabit or khabits served as St. Katherine. At Sev's elevation, someone seems to have arranged a test of his powers. They substituted a heavy real sword for the fake one, and hypnotized Sev into striking for real. If he had no powers of healing, all it would cost is the life of the khabit, who was no longer needed since Catherine had died the previous year. Sev passed with flying colors, healing "St. Katharine" in a spectacular fashion that conformed to his expectations of how the scene would play out.

Catherine herself was kept alive for many years, possibly in the third level of the oubillette. This is just a guess, but her execution might have been ordered so that Vodalus would come to the graveyard to change Sev's life. Vodalus could be told "A woman just died who is supposed to have come from the future. It might be interesting to eat her brain and learn what she knows."

Roy C. Lackey — 29 Jun 2008, 03:48 · follows Dave Tallman

Dave Tallman wrote:

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There are difficulties inherent with trying to map a person's life to some lines from a play. But let's assume that your basic idea is correct, that the woman Sev saw in the loggia was his mother, Ouen's Catherine. Naturally, I have some questions. <g>

Who gave the order to escort/arrest her? Valeria? She acted so addle-brained at the end as to seem uncomprehending of Urth's doom-in-progress. Aside from the generic value of exultant hostages to the autarchy, what made that particular woman so important to Valeria that she merited special attention? The Praetorians were the autarch's personal guards. Who but the autarch

could command them? Inire? Sev had left him in charge of the Commonwealth when he went to Yesod, but that seems not to have lasted for long, otherwise Valeria would not be on the throne. Inire seems not to have been around any more.

Nessus was already two days drowned when Sev saw the woman, and the House Absolute was shortly to be inundated, so where was she being taken, and how?

When and where was she born? During the forty years Sev was gone?

If she was an exultant, then so were both of her parents. Who were they, and do they appear anywhere in the Urth Cycle? (It seems odd that Ouen never mentioned that he was shackled-up with an exultant. And exultants didn't choose to bury their dead on Citadel Hill. Of course, being buried before she was born might make for an exception. Still, the Guild's victims were buried in the lower reaches, not up where the graves had monuments, which is where the grave of the woman whose body was stolen was located.)

-Roy

Dave Tallman — 29 Jun 2008, 05:24 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Roy C. Lackey wrote:

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I found an additional metaphorical clue in the play to strengthen this theory:

Contessa: ... I was to look like a post decked with morning-glories, it would seem. Meschia: Brat! Don't trifle with holy things while I am near, or dare do anything but what I tell you.

The Contessa's words about morning-glories seem to Meschia to be trifling with holy things, which makes sense if we think of the New Sun as a "Morning Glory." She is "a post decked with morning-glories," i.e. she provides a place for the New Sun to grow (her womb).

Parallel to this is the image of moonflowers. The Autarch says "... and train the pale moonflower to climb that staff." Moonflowers are a night-blooming variety of morning-glories. In this imagery I suggest they portray the Moon to the morning glory's Sun. The list of persons in the play lists "The New Sun", "The Old Sun", and "The Moon", which I suggest would be played by Severian, Dr. Talos, and Dorcas respectively. Dorcas once wore a moonflower in her hair (Shadow XXX). If the Sun is like Christ, the Moon is like the Church, shining with reflected light. In the context of these books, I would say it represents the followers of Sev (such as Dorcas, the prophetess, and the new society on Ushas).

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The autarchy has always been heavily influenced, if not controlled, by the Heirogrammates. I see no reason why Father Inire would not still be around, exerting influence behind the scenes. He's been around from the earliest days of the autarchy, so why not stay until the end? But the people would never tolerate a direct rule by the hated "cacogens." Valeria was a necessary figurehead.

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The Atrium of Time was flooded, but she could be helped to get to the sunken lower levels that lead to the past, if necessary. But I tend to think there were other time-travel mechanisms in the hidden part of the House Absolute. The first Catherine has to have escaped on her own, and therefore needed inside knowledge (see below for a guess on where she got this information).

When and where was she born? During the forty years Sev was gone?

If she was an exultant, then so were both of her parents. Who were they, and do they appear anywhere in the Urth Cycle? (It seems odd that Ouen never mentioned that he was shackled-up with an exultant. And exultants didn't choose to bury their dead on Citadel Hill. Of course, being buried before she was born might make for an exception. Still, the Guild's victims were buried in the lower reaches, not up where the graves had monuments, which is where the grave of the woman whose body was stolen was located.)

Yes, I think she was born during the forty years Sev was gone. Because of this, her exact parentage is hard to trace. My guess is that she is a descendant of Master Ultan (for his photographic memory, and for Sev's being reminded of her by the sight of Ultan in Shadow VI). She may also be a descendant of Chatelaine Sancha from "The Cat." Sancha had access to many of Father Inire's secrets as a favorite of his, and may have passed them on to her relatives. I note also that "Cat" is a nickname for Catherine.

I'm dropping the theory that she's the daughter of Valeria, who was a mere armigette. It would also make the time paradoxes much worse. Valeria wouldn't be in a position to have Catherine without having married Sev.

If I'm right about the manipulation of the grave-robbing scene, the grave's location was dictated by the expected path of Severian back from his swimming accident. It doesn't have to be where she would normally be buried.